

## A Guide to Writing SLOs

*NOTE: These hints have been culled from a variety of sources across California and the US. (Cabrillo College, El Camino College, Miracosta College, colleges in the east, community colleges and universities). Since they are often the same from place to place, it is difficult to know where they originated.*

- In one sentence for each outcome, answer the question: “What should students be able to do with the information I’m teaching after they finish the course? What is the ultimate goal a year from now?”
- Describe what students will do -- not content, activities or hours.
- Describe broader, complex, higher order knowledge and skills.
- Describe observable and assessable behavior.
- Use action verbs. See Bloom’s Taxonomy.
- Write it in language that a student will understand.
- Make statements concise and unambiguous.
- Remember that you probably already have them in mind and have been using them without realizing it. Begin with where you are.
- Keep thinking from the students’ point of view and ask, “What can students walk out of my class with?”
- Be explicit and always ask, “What’s important? What am I doing and why?”
- Ask students to produce something - papers, projects, portfolios, demonstrations, performances, art works, exams etc. – that **applies** what they have learned.

Hint: Sometimes it’s easier to start backwards by thinking about the major assessments you use in the course. These would be the products or demonstrations of your outcomes. Make a list of your major assignments for this course. Then try to describe in one sentence what the students are being asked to demonstrate in those assignments.

### Some Dos and Don’ts:

- Don’t use the words “understand” - go for higher level thinking skills.
- Don’t use the phrase “students will.” Avoid any pronouns like “them” or “their.”
- Do distinguish the difference between an A and B courses of the same number.
- **Keep the number of outcomes short – no more than four or five at most** (except if the outcomes of your courses are dictated by the requirements of outside accrediting bodies, like in nursing or dental hygiene).
- Use the outcomes to describe the **major** skills or knowledge students will take away from the course and what they will **produce** to show you that they have mastered those skills.

## Student Learning Outcomes versus Course Objectives

Course objectives describe small, discreet skills or “nuts and bolts” that require basic thinking skills. They are subsets of outcomes. Think of objectives as the building blocks used to produce whatever is used to demonstrate mastery of an outcome. Objectives can be practiced and assessed individually, but are usually only a portion of an overall project or application.

Objectives	Outcomes
Objectives describe skills, tools or content that a student will master by the end of course.	Outcomes describe over-arching, long-term skill that a student will be able to demonstrate by the end of a course and take with him when he leaves.
Objectives require the use of basic thinking skills such as knowledge, comprehension and application.	Outcomes require the use of higher level thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
Objectives can be measured discreetly, but do not necessarily result in a product.	Outcomes should result in a product that can be measured or assessed.

## Assessing a Student Learning Outcome

**Step One:** Chose **one** course SLO from one class that you are teaching in a particular semester.

**Step Two:** Chose one major graded assignment that you feel measures some aspect of the course SLO. It should be an assignment you always give that you feel is important.

Tests, projects and assignments should be designed to show what students can do, not what has been covered. From the beginning of the term, students should know how they are going to be evaluated and what criteria will be used.

**Step Three:** Develop a rubric or grading scale that articulates in words how you grade that assignment. If you only use exams, identify groups of specific questions on one of your major exams that you feel address the competency. It will be most helpful if there are several questions.

**Step Four:** Give the assignment or exam this semester. Grade it using the rubric you developed in Step Three. If you are using an exam with scanners, make a second key to grade the specific questions related to the SLO. Keep a record of the rubric or the questions and the results.

**Step Five:** Analyze the results of your assessment. Share the assignment you gave, the methods or rubrics you used to grade it and the results with your colleagues. If more than one section of a class gave the same assignment share the results with each other or score the assignments together if you are comfortable doing that. Based on the results, describe how you would change or improve the teaching of this assignment. Were you satisfied? What do you need as an instructor to improve your teaching and/or the student learning of the assignment? What does your department need to have to improve the teaching and learning in department courses in general. What do you need from the college?